

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

For Release SEPTEMBER 10, 1948.

FUR SEALS WITH RUBBER COLLARS BAFLE F.W.S. BIOLOGISTS

The mystery of the rubber "collars" found on the necks of nine Pribilof Island fur seals during the past five summers is solved, according to Frank G. Ashbrook, who is in charge of the Fish and Wildlife Service's wild fur animal investigations.

Since July 16, 1944, when the first three-year-old fur seal was recovered with a ring-like piece of thin sheet rubber around its neck, Service biologists have been baffled trying to explain the collars' origin.

Mr. Ashbrook disclosed today that the Air Force's Air Material Command, Wright-Patterson Air Base, Dayton, Ohio, had closely examined the rubber collars and has suggested that they are fragments of rubber bags used by the Japanese during World War II for aerial delivery of food and water to their besieged troops in the Aleutian Islands.

Many of the aerial bags missed their mark when parachuted down, Mr. Ashbrook believes, and were blown out to sea where they floated on the surface of the water. He says that their food attracted the small pup seals who probably plunged through the narrow openings of the rubber bags. Clinging to the pup seals' necks, the bags could not be dislodged and eventually crumbled away. The rubber rings remained on the necks of the fur seals as collars.

The rubber-collared fur seals were recovered during the sealing operations which the Fish and Wildlife Service conducts when the fur seal herd leaves the sea each spring. The herd goes ashore on the bleak, volcanic Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, dwells there for about three months to breed, and then turns back to the sea.

The rubber collars fitted snugly around the seals' necks and cut through the fur and skin of the animals. They resembled the rolled top of a woman's stocking.

It was believed by some Service biologists that Japanese or Russian scientists studying fur seal migratory habits had placed the rubber collars on the animals' necks for identification purposes. But the Service was unable to prove this theory.

Army and Navy technicians were unable to recognize the rubber collars as being part of their equipment. Rubber manufacturers reported that the rubber had probably been manufactured in a foreign country.

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(Note to Editors: Photographs of a rubber collar on the fur seal are available. Copies may be obtained from Morton A. Reichel, Division of Information, Fish and Wildlife Service, Washington, D. C.)